

## **WATERSHED LESSON #10:**

### ***Build on Small Successes***

Small successes fuel future, larger ones. It is important, according to watershed practitioners, to start small and demonstrate success before working on a larger scale. For this reason demonstration projects are often a popular choice in watershed work. In some states, small victories have been instrumental in prompting the implementation of the watershed approach statewide.

Commitment to the watershed is key, and a small group's passion for its improvement can catch fire. Practitioners also say over and over that it's important to "Celebrate Success" as it occurs.

### ***Morro Bay, California***

#### ***Where Starting Small Has Paid Off***

Carol Arnold, with the California State Coastal Conservancy, went to work to protect Morro Bay back in 1986 after becoming aware that the community perceived the Bay to be threatened by erosion and sedimentation. A previous study sponsored by the San Luis Obispo County had also identified this problem, but the study like most of its kind received little attention. However, it was clear that resource managers, politicians, and citizens were concerned that the Bay was filling and becoming shallower, which eventually would be detrimental to navigation, tourism, migratory birds, endangered species, and the surrounding community.

The Conservancy started small by talking to citizens about the resource. Long time residents in the community explained how parts of the back Bay had once been open water but were now becoming increasingly terrestrial. As a way to respond to their concerns, the Conservancy, the State Coastal Commission, and the County hosted a forum at which approximately a hundred politicians, government professionals, environmentalists, and business people gathered to discuss the Bay. The consensus of the participants was that, while there were many issues of concern such as public access, water quality, and development, the predominant concern was sedimentation.

Given this focus, the Conservancy went to the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District and entered into a six year partnership to reduce sedimentation of Morro Bay. The District worked with landowners to manage grazing through the use of fences, to plug gullies, and to implement rotation systems so that no one area was overgrazed. The Conservancy with matching funds from other farmers and the Natural Resource Conservation Service paid for these improvements. The Conservancy also secured the assistance of a technical consultant who found that the average loss of open water over the past 100 years had been 25 percent overall and 60 percent in some parts with critical habitat. This was 3 to 4 times the normal rate of filling. Responding to these findings,

the Conservancy issued a grant to the Resource Conservation District, who worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to analyze the erosion problem and to help remedy it.

The Conservancy then turned its attention to restoring the floodplain in the lower drainage areas and to restoring habitat. With the help of the Coastal Conservancy, the Resource Conservation District purchased agricultural land in the lower watershed and is in the process of restoring parts of the floodplain to its natural condition.

***So much interest grew out of these activities that local residents decided to apply to become part of the National Estuary Program***

At the same time, the Conservancy was helping to organize groups to increase community awareness, education, and involvement. Friends of Morro Bay was established for advocacy, the Morro Bay Foundation was founded for research and education, and a Morro Bay Task Force was set up to help involve local residents. So much interest grew out of these activities that local residents decided to apply to become part of the National Estuary Program. In the early 90's, a local assembly person helped get the bay designated as a 'State Estuary', and shortly thereafter the Bay was accepted into the National Estuary Program.

Carol Arnold believes that part of the reason for Morro Bay's designation was strong community involvement. She believes that it's important to have the support build up from the community and not be imposed from the outside. In addition, she believes that it's important to focus on manageable issues that are meaningful to people and provide a focal point around which action can occur. Over time, other issues can be addressed after a commitment and networks have been established.

***For more information:*** contact Carol Arnold, 510-286-4173, California Coastal Conservancy

***Lower Paint Creek Association, West Virginia  
It's Amazing What A Small Number Can Accomplish***

***3,200 bags of trash and 1,400 tires later...***

The first clean-up that Dwight Siemiaczko, President of the Lower Paint Creek Association in West Virginia (he is also a miner), ran involved only five or six people. Despite the small turnout, it was a huge success. The West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection was a partner; the fee they paid for the tipping at the land fill was critical.

The word got out about the first clean up, and by the time the Association hosted its fifth

one 25 people participated and 600 tons of trash was collected. A key to their success is the fact that they built incrementally, had strong leadership, and were passionate in their effort. Rather than tackling the entire 43 mile stretch of river, which would in Dwight's eyes have set them up for failure, they focused initially on the lower 14, with the intention of moving up incrementally over time.

The work of the Association has stimulated the interest of other groups. For example, a local High School wood shop class has developed signs to post throughout the watershed. The U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining has invested \$325,000 to clean up a tributary, which will result in \$2.3 million annually in added fishing revenues - an amazing return for the investment. As for lessons he has learned, Dwight has come to believe that financial and other support by government is critical to advancing local watershed programs; no one can do the job alone.

***For more information:*** contact Dwight Siemiaczko, 304-595-3325, 304-595-3325 (fax), 5pole@citynet.net or Pete Pitsenbarger, Chief, Office of Abandoned Mine Lands and Reclamation, West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection, 304-759-0521.

## ***Santa Ynez Watershed***

### ***The Willow War is Only One of the Conflicts***

Carolyn Barr with the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County tells this story of an unsuccessful watershed planning effort.

Along the Santa Ynez River, farmers who grow vegetables and flowers in the rich soils of the floodplain have been pleading with the county for flood control. They fear that the river may jump its banks because dense growths of willows impede peak storm water flows. The county says that it cannot help unless it receives funds to mitigate the riparian habitat damage that would occur if the willows were removed or cut back. The willow war is only one of many conflicts in the 900 square mile Santa Ynez River watershed.

In 1994, politicians, planners, and farmers enlisted the Coastal Conservancy's help in resolving the flood control issue. The Conservancy agreed, on condition that the problem be considered within a watershed-wide plan. They invited the Land Trust to coordinate the planning process.

***it soon became clear that we were rowing upstream  
in a class-five rapid without a paddle***

Our naive notion was that we could get everyone with a stake in watershed issues to listen to each other, study the issues, and eventually come to understand that all would benefit from a resolution. But as property rights advocates, farmers, environmentalists, and resource agency staff sat down together, it soon became clear that we were rowing

upstream in a class-five rapid without a paddle. The three sponsoring agencies- the California Coastal Conservancy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Santa Barbara County- and the project manager pulled the plug on the project at the fourth steering committee meeting, in February 1996, less than a year after the process began.

We realized that we had not done enough groundwork and were proceeding on the mistaken assumption that there was broad support for a watershed plan. On the Santa Ynez, no single problem required watershed-wide attention. The need for planning was apparent only to farmers on the main river channel, and to a handful of others who were losing acreage to unstable stream banks and gully erosion. The fatal mistake we made was in rushing the process and telling the landowners, water districts, and special interest groups that they were going to have to work together and develop a watershed plan. We did not take the time to understand their interests and fears, and we tried to impose a process that was not appropriate for the place and time.

***For more information:*** contact Reed Holderman, (510) 286-4183, rholderman@igc.org (See Appendix 1 for Lessons Learned).

## ***Upper Arkansas Watershed Council, Colorado***

### ***Can a Citizen's Law Seminar Get the Ball Rolling?***

Having a wide diversity of interests represented in a watershed organization is good. Being inclusive and open is necessary. Operating with a consensus-based decision-making process honors everyone. As important as all these things are, they often limit what can actually be done by a watershed group. Education-related projects often provide the first easy step that sets the foundation for trust and group cohesion.

The Upper Arkansas Watershed Council in Colorado is made up of 25 organizations with very different values regarding the use of water. There are historic conflicts between these groups that are deeply rooted in these value differences. During their planning process, the Council brain stormed and scored a wide array of possible actions. To no great surprise, the highly contentious issues scored low, while the education items scored high.

One of the first agreed-upon actions was a Citizen's Water Law Seminar. In the West, the Prior Appropriation law, which is based on the idea that water is a private property right, has evolved into a complex and often mystifying tangle of rules. Additionally, water quality, in-stream flows, and recreation issues complicate the understanding of water law. Many of our community leaders (county commissioners, planning and zoning boards, etc.), several of whom are new to Colorado, admitted to little understanding of the law, yet recognized its importance in their work.

The Council agreed that it did not matter which side of a water issue anyone represents --

agriculture, development, environmental, recreation -- the law is the law, and the more citizens that understand the water law, the better.

In brief, the Seminar was held and was a wonderful success. It was planned in three months, was low-budget, gave the Council strong local credibility, and provided an early success upon which to tackle tougher issues.

**For more information:** Jeff Keidel, Coordinator, Upper Arkansas Watershed Council, P.O. Box 938, Buena Vista, Colorado 81211, 719-395-6035.

## ***Key Contacts and Resources***

### SUCCESS STORIES AND NATIONAL PROJECT SUMMARIES

- ***Blue Thumb-An Urban Watershed Success Story***, Susan Gray, Extension Horticulture/Water Quality Agent, Michael Smolen, Water Quality Coordinator Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Cheryl Cheadle, District Manager, Tulsa County Conservation District, Laura Pollard, District Manager, Oklahoma County Conservation District, Jennifer Myers, Blue Thumb Coordinator, John , Water, Quality Programs Coordinator, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, paper presented at Watershed '96, <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/Proceed/gray.html>
- ***Global Rivers Environmental Education Network (GREEN) Success Stories***, <http://www.igc.apc.org/green/success.html>, people learn a lot by sharing stories and this is a site designed to provide an opportunity users to share stories about successful efforts their organization, school or community has made to research, educate about, or improve their local watershed -- and to see what others have done.
- ***Section 319 Nonpoint Source Success Stories***, <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/NPS/Success319/>, *Section 319 Nonpoint Source Success Stories* demonstrates the successful implementation of the Section 319 Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source program. The report provides examples of successful solutions to a variety of water quality problems caused by nonpoint source pollution. Contact: Amy Gambrell, 202-260-7105, US EPA, 401 M Street, S.W. 4503F, Washington, DC, 20460
- ***The Watershed Sourcebook: Watershed-Based Solutions to Natural Resource Problems***, University of Colorado School of Law, Natural Resources Law Center, Campus Box 401, Boulder, Colorado, 80309-0401, Doug Kenney, (303) 492-1288, (303) 492-1297 (fax), [Douglas.Kenney@Colorado.EDU](mailto:Douglas.Kenney@Colorado.EDU), concise case studies of 76 watershed initiatives in the western United States. Center is also examining the state and federal roles in supporting watershed groups.
- ***The Watershed Protection Approach: 1993/4 Activity Report***, EPA840-S-94-001, November 1994, <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/watershd93-94-Activity.html>, describes over 120 projects where EPA was a partner in implementing the watershed approach. Call 1-800-490-9198 for a free copy.

### LOCAL EXAMPLES

- ***"How the McKenzie Watershed Council Got Started"***, May 1995, describes the story of the formation of the council and provides advice to others. Lane Council of

- Governments, 125 E. 8th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401, 503-687-4283
- ***California Coast and Ocean***, Volume 8, Numbers 3&4, Fall 1992, pages 8-20 discuss Morro Bay, Carol Arnold, Program Manager, 1330 Broadway, 11th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612-2530, 510-286-4173, 510-286-0470 (fax), carola@igc.org.
  - ***Water Works: Your Neighbors Share Ideas on Working in Partnership for Clean Water***, Tennessee Valley Authority, March 1997. Useful guide. Kathleen O'Brien, editor, 423-632-8502, 423-632-3188 (fax). See stories of Marlene Fields and Milt Jackson.